

would pause before it and shake his head.

"My, that sure is a pretty barn," he would say dreamily.

"That sure is pretty as a peach."

The warm air rang with the sound of saw and hammer. While the men worked on the barn Garnet and her mother had their hands full with the house and garden; for now the garden was yielding in all its abundance. It was hard to keep up with it. When you had finished picking all the beans it was time to pick the yellow squashes, shaped like hunting hems. And when you got through with the squash it was time for the beans again. And then you had to hurry, hurry and gather the bursting ripe tomatoes from the heavy vines, for canning. Then there were beets and carrots to be attended to, and after that it was time for the beans again.

"Beans never know when to stop!" said Garnet's mother in annoyance.

Corn was picked every day; and that was pleasant, walking in the rustling good-smelling aisles between the stalks. And the watermelons! Big solid green ones that Garnet thumped with a finger to see if they sounded ripe. And every now and then she dropped one on purpose and it would burst open, cold as a glacier and rosy red. Then she would walk homeward dripping and drooling, spitting out black seeds and feeling fine.

And canning! Oh those weeks of harvesting and peeling and preparing apples, peaches, tomatoes, cucumbers, plume and beans. All day the kitchen smelled like heaven and was filled with steam. The stove was covered with kettles and vats, and upside down on the window-sill stood processions of mason jars full of bright color and hot to the touch.

Then in the middle of it all came the time for threshing.

Several weeks before, Mr. Linden had mowed his oat fields, and Garnet had helped Jay and Eric stack the tied

yellow bundles in shocks: six yellow bundles with their heads bowed together and a seventh on top, like a hat. When they were finished the field was dotted with oat shocks like other fields all up and down the valley; it looked nice. But now the oats were dry, and ready for threshing.

Every year Mr. Linden rented the Hauser's threshing machine for one day. That meant that Mr. Hauser and Cicero and Merle came with it and helped. Mr. Freebody was always on hand and Jasper Cardiff and his two sons always came down from Big Hollow. Some of the men would bring their wives with them to visit and help Mrs. Linden with the cooking; threshers eat a lot.

Already there were cakes in the pantry, and five different kinds of pie nestled under clean dish towels. There were new loaves of bread too, and at dinner time there would be pork and beans, and mountains of mashed potato, and oceans of gravy. The big agate coffeepot would be simmering on the stove, and by half past twelve every single thing would be gone! Garnet remembered other threshings.

Early in the morning she heard the grumble of a tractor and the toot of a whistle on a threshing machine and looked out of the window to see the pair of them lumbering across the fields toward the new barn. The thresher had a long neck like a dinosaur, with a sort of fringed mustache on the end of it to keep the oat straw from blowing too far. It was a huge gangling machine covered with wheels and belts and pipes and bolts; it looked almost too complicated to be efficient.

By the time Garnet finished her housework and got outdoors, the threshing was well under way.

Mr. Hauser sat like an emperor upon the seat of the tractor which was attached to the threshing machine by a long swiftly sliding belt. Men tossed bundles of oats

onto a moving ramp which fed them into the wildly gnashing jaws of the thresher. Inside of the monster some mysterious process went on which separated the kernels from the stalks. The kernels were swept in gusts down a long pipe at one side; it had two mouths on which Cicero Hauser was tenderly fastening burlap bags which filled as rapidly as he could replace them. Straw and chaff flew out of the pipe that looked like a dinosaur's neck, and clouds of golden dust filled the air. Men worked hard, pitching the bundles, packing down the straw, and hauling heavy oat sacks to the little granary by the new barn. Mr. Freebody sat high on the front of the machine, steering its long neck with a wheel, helping to build the straw stack tall, firm, and symmetrical.

"What can I do, Daddy?" Garnet asked her father, and sneezed. The flying chaff tickled and choked her and got into her eyes. She felt itchy all over, but it was fun; everyone was working together in such speed and excitement. She wanted to have a part in it.

"Well - " said her father, considering, "you might help Cicero with the oat sacks; or you can throw on bundles that have fallen on the ground. There're lots of things you could do."

Cicero showed her how to wrap the burlap sacks around the pipe mouths and hold them tight with a metal clamp; and how, when one sack was full, to push a lever towards the other one, so that the oats would fall into that. You had to work fast or oats spilled on the ground and were wasted. Above the roar of the motor it was nice to hear the smooth swift rush of kernels down the pipe.

When she had worked there for nearly an hour Garnet helped toss bundles onto the moving ramp. Jay worked beside her, pitching and perspiring and grunting with fatigue. He looked serious and important, and when she spoke to him he answered shortly.

By and by Garnet climbed up on top of the machine to see what Mr. Freebody was doing. His eyebrows and big mustache were full of chaff, and he looked like an old walrus that had got mixed up with some seaweed.

"I could eat an elephant," he told Garnet, "a nice roasted elephant, with onions and brown gravy. In fact I think an elephant's the only thing that would be enough of a meal to satisfy me right now."

Garnet laughed. "We aren't having it though," she said. "Our butcher doesn't carry it. But we have got five different kinds of pie: apple, peach, blueberry, lemon, and butterscotch!"

Mr. Freebody closed his eyes for a minute and sighed as if this was too much for him.

"Next to roast elephant I like pie best of all," he said.

Ahead of them the glittering stack grew slowly taller till it was like a little mountain made of spun gold. Eric moved about on top of it, packing it down and malting it even with a pitchfork. Every now and then he lost his balance and fell into the soft straw; Garnet and Mr. Freebody laughed loudly and rudely every time this happened.

"Wait here a minute," said Mr. Freebody suddenly. "Them boys ain't getting the loads in quick enough. I better go help 'em pitch. Yell take this over, Garnet. I'll show you how to work it." And he explained to her that the wheel on the left turned the great pipe from side to side, and the wheel on right raised it up and down.

"Do you think it'll be all right?" asked Garnet nervously.

"Oh it's gentle as a baby," said Mr. Freebody. "T would eat right out of your hand if you'd let it. Just pet its neck once in a while and handle the wheels like I said, and it'll go on blowing its durndest till the cows

come home."

All the same Garnet felt extremely important as she turned the pipe slowly to what she considered a good position and pulled the rope which lifted its long mustache, and allowed the straw to blow ah the way back over the stack. The golden smoke of chaff and straw thickened the air, and her arms and legs were covered with a shining dust.

Eric climbed down from the pile to get a drink of water; the engine roared and chugged, and the sun of noonday burned in all its glory. Garnet felt drowsy; she sat up straight, opened her eyes very wide, tried humming a song, but it didn't do any good. Pretty soon her head dropped anyway, and her thoughts began turning slowly, strangely, into dreams.

"Look out!" shouted a loud voice behind her, and she lifted her head. Then she grabbed the wheel and held onto it in bewilderment. Could it be an earthquake? Was she dizzy? Because now the golden mountain had begun to move by itself. It was moving toward her, and towering above her, and suddenly beginning to slip slowly and then faster over and upon her, till she was engulfed, half smothered by dry, tickling, prickling yellow straw. She understood then that the pile must have become top-heavy and capsized.

Eric came to her rescue, dug her out and brushed the clinging straw from her clothes.

"That was stupid of me," said Garnet. She felt awful.

"Oh think nothing of it," said Eric. "I should've been on the job instead of getting a drink. We'll have it all piled up again in a jiffy anyway."

But Jay came towards her scowling.

"Well for Pete's sake!" he said angrily. "You certainly made a mess of it that time all right! Why don't you stay home and help mother? Threshing isn't any-

thing for girls to be monkeying with anyway; home with a dish towel, that's where you belong! This will slow up the whole works."

Garnet turned and ran across the hot fields. The oat stubble stood up like little lances and hurt her bare feet, and grasshoppers popped and scattered like sparks from a fire. Tears filled her eyes and made the meadow surge and swim before her in a golden flood.

"Hateful Jay! Mean, mean, mean," she cried under her breath; "I won't ever feel the same about him again. I hate him."

Oh Jay, what has happened to you, she thought. Jay who had been her best friend always, and who had considered her his equal in many things -- well practically his equal anyway. Ever since Eric had come he had been different. And now just think how he had spoken to her! As if she were a baby, or a sissy, or somebody he didn't like.

She turned back towards the house and went up the path through the garden. Maybe her mother would make her feel all right again.

The kitchen seemed to be filled with women. Mrs. Hauser and her sister were sitting fat and solid on a bench, and old Mrs. Eberhardt rocked and creaked in the rocking chair. Two Cardiff ladies were busy at the sink and about their feet Donald and a little Cardiff crawled and shouted. Mrs. Linden was opening the oven door and laughing at something someone had said. The air rang with women's voices and the shouting of small children. Clearly this was no time to disturb her mother, and Garnet, unnoticed, stole up the stairway to her Little loom. It would be hot up there under the eaves, but it would be quiet at least and nobody would bother her. She pushed open the half closed door and stopped.

There on her bed, fat, pleased with himself, and

babbling, lay the youngest Hauser baby, Leroy. He was red and dimpled and fair-haired and Garnet had always liked him until today. But now she looked at him coldly as he waved his legs and arms, and showed his two teeth in a foolish smile, and she felt that she positively Loathed him.

"All right!" said Garnet severely to the baby." There's no room for me in my own house, and they don't want me out at the threshing, and I'll just go away, that's all. Just go away by myself!"

She washed, combed her hair, and put on a blue dress and a pair of strapped shoes. The shoes felt stiff and uncomfortable to toes that had gone bare all summer, and there was starch in the collar of the dress that scratched her neck. She hated dresses anyway, and buttoning the difficult small buttons she hiccupped with sobs. No one has ever been so unhappy before, she thought to herself. Maybe they'll all be sorry later on!

In the shiny pocketbook that her grandmother had sent her for Christmas there was half a dollar, a new handkerchief, the silver thimble that she had found weeks ago, and a bottle of perfume from the dime store. She wound the link chain tight around her wrist and wondered whether or not to wear her hat. She took it out of the closet and looked at it. It was a yellow hat made of cheap straw and it poked up on top of the crown. Garnet thought it was the sort of hat that the pig in the nursery rhyme might have worn to market. When she put it on and looked in the mirror at her red nose and long sad pigtails under the dejected hat brim, she pulled it off in fury and threw it on the floor. Leroy blew a big bubble in appreciation.

"Oh you!" grumbled Garnet. "Why don't you stay home in your own crib!"

She creaked down the stairs in her uncomfortable shoes and slipped through the kitchen.

"Where are you going Garnet?" called her mother above the fat voices of the women. "Dinner's almost ready."

"Oh, just out," replied Garnet vaguely. "I'm not hungry anyway. Too many people around." She closed the screen door behind her; she didn't care if she was rude. No one suspected the hot little fire of anger and despair that burned beneath her ribs.

She began to run now, sliding in her slippery shoes. She didn't want anyone to stop her, and she saw Mr. Freebody ambling across the field.

"Hey there!" shouted Mr. Freebody, but Garnet pretended not to hear him and ran all the faster.

When she had reached the highway her anger began to turn into a feeling of excitement. She hadn't planned where she would go, but Eric's stories of hitchhiking were still fresh in her mind. I'll try it anyway, she thought, and stopped at the roadside; he isn't the only one who can travel and do things by himself!

The first car that passed was full of people, and as the second approached she held up her hand. The car slowed down, and to her horror she saw that she knew the people inside: Miss Pentland, her old mother, and two smiley ladies from Big Hollow.

"It's little Ruby Linden," Garnet heard Miss Pentland shouting to her mother who was deaf. "Good morning, Ruby! Did you want to drive into Blaiseville?"

Garnet wanted nothing less. She was in a bad temper, and her feelings were hurt, and she wanted to be far away from all the people and objects that she knew. And anyhow, what adventure was to be had in a closed coupe, being polite to these four nice ladies.

"Why no -- no thank you," stammered Garnet, "I just waved, that's all."

"All right, dear," said Miss Pentland. "Hot, isn't it?"



It was hot. Heat trembled over the shining road. Garnet watched it anxiously.

A fat little roadster rounded the bend and she again raised her hand; but this time the car whistled by her without even slowing down. She felt rebuffed.

Two more cars and a truck passed in the same manner; but finally an old black sedan wobbled to a stop beside her. "Want a lift?" asked the man at the wheel; and his wife smiled encouragingly, a brilliant smile with a gold tooth in it.

"Yes, please, I do," said Garnet gratefully, feeling like an explorer embarking on a perilous journey.

"How far are you aiming to go, little girl?" asked the woman.

For a second Garnet wondered frantically what to tell her. Then she decided.

"New Conniston," she answered firmly. New Conniston was eighteen miles away. To Garnet who had never seen a larger city it seemed enormous and as glamorous as Bagdad, or Zanzibar, or Constantinople. It was a town built on a steep hill. There were trolley cars there, department stores, and three different kinds of dime stores. There was a movie theatre, and a little park with fountain in it and some old Civil War cannons. Garnet had been there only three or four times in her life, and never by herself.

"New Conniston!" said the lady. "Well, we ain't going quite so far as that; only to Hodgeville. But maybe you can get the bus from there."

Garnet sat in the middle of the backseat by herself, and looked at the backs of their necks. The man's was thin and wiry and brown with sun and crisscrossed with lines. It looked all dried out like a piece of bark; a regular farmer's neck. But the woman's was fat and comfortable. Looking and she wore a bead necklace with a rhinestone clasp at

the back. Her hat was just like anybody's hat.

The woman turned her full pink face towards Garnet and stared at her curiously.

"Seems to me like you're pretty young to be hitch-hiking," she remarked. "If I was your mama, I don't think I'd like it much."

Garnet's toes wriggled uncomfortably in her shoes. She didn't know what to say.

"Well, young folks are real enterprising nowadays," said the man. "Always was, I guess, and always will be. Why I remember when I was a kid once, I walked fourteen miles to see a circus. Just walked off and left my chores; left cows that needed milking and hogs that had to be fed, and I didn't say nothing to my folks because I had a pretty good idea of what they'd think about it. I can remember right this minute how that circus tent looked, all lighted up like a birthday cake. I just had enough money to get me inside, and not a cent left over for pop or peanuts; and going off that way without supper, my stomach felt as empty as a rag-picker's pocket. Didn't care though. I saw the circus all through, elephants, lady horse-riders in tights End all the rest of it. Time I got home it was almost day-break, and my dad was waiting up. He took a strap to me, and I deserved it. But I always kind of felt it was worth it too."

Garnet thought probably it had been, but she didn't say so.

"Worth it nothing!" cried the woman indignantly.

"Why your mother must've been half crazy with worry!"

Garnet decided to change the subject. She felt quite sure that this lady wouldn't approve of her own behavior if she knew about it.

"Are you -- do you live in Hodgeville?" she asked.

"No indeed," said the lady. "We live over to Deep-

water, but we get up to Hodgeville pretty often."

"She's a singer," explained the man, jerking his head sideways at his wife. "Got one of the finest contralto voices you ever listened to. When she lets go of it full blast even the cook stove trembles. She sings at church festivals, and meetings all up and down the county. And besides that she takes in washing, and keeps house, and does fancy needlework. Won two ribbons at the fair last year, she did."

Garnet could tell that he was very proud of his wife. And she saw that the woman's cheeks had a rounder curve because she was beaming with pleasure.

"Oh I wish I could hear you sing once," said Garnet. "I never in my life heard a contralto!"

"Go on, sing something for the little girl, Ella," Urged the man. "Let it rip. There's no one on the road."

"Well, let's see," said the woman patting her bead necklace and clearing her throat. "How about a hymn?"

"Yes!" cried Garnet. " 'Rock of Ages,' please." It was the only hymn she could remember.

Suddenly the woman began to sing. Garnet held onto the edge of the seat. "Rock of Ages, cleft for me," sang the woman; and Garnet understood about the cook stove trembling. She had never heard a voice so powerful before. It filled the sedan till her head reeled and her ears rang. And it floated richly and enormously out into the summer day. Garnet saw three Little towheaded children on a fence with their mouths and eyes wide open in surprise; she saw a farmer put down his pitchfork and stare after them; she saw some cows in a pasture raise their heads in worry and bewilderment. And she felt as though in another minute the tremendous voice would blow her out of the window.

The song ended. and the woman turned her head expectantly.

"Well, how was that?" enquired the husband.

"Oh it was wonderful," said Garnet rather weakly.

"I never heard anything so -- so huge in all my life!"

"That's right," agreed the man. "If we could just hitch up the power in her voice, we could make enough electricity to light up the whole of New Conniston, I bet."

The first Hodgeville houses appeared. The woman settled her hat and looked at Garnet.

"You going to be all right now, dear?" she asked.

"I'd take the bus from here if I was you. You never know what people you'll meet up with hitchhiking. Have you money enough?"

"Oh yes, I have quite a lot," replied Garnet thinking of her fine round half dollar still unspent. Why you could do a hundred different things with so much money. Ride on buses, eat enough ice cream to be uncomfortable, buy things in dime stores, maybe go to a movie even! Perhaps there would be a Western picture at the Dreamland Theater in New Conniston; she hoped so; one with plenty of horses and bloodshed.

The man stopped the car in the main street by the bus station.

"You're just in time, little girl," said he. "Bus going out of here in a couple of minutes."

"Don't get lost now," said the woman.

"You going to the fair to New Conniston when it comes?" asked her husband. "You look in the needlework section if you do; the quilts with the most prizes will be hers. Maybe we'll see you there. Zangl is the name."

"Mr. and Mrs. Earl Zangl," added his wife.

"I hope I will see you again," said Garnet. "Thank you for the ride and for the song."

They were nice people; for a minute she felt sorry

to see them go. But in the next minute, she forgot about them and climbed into the bus.

### **VIII. "As a Rag picker's Pocket"**

IT WAS an old bus but still jaunty looking, and the driver had a rose stuck in his cap, and a pencil behind one ear. He looked younger than the bus.

There were only two other people inside: a woman fanning herself with a newspaper, and a man asleep with his mouth open.

Garnet settled herself on a large slippery seat with a leatherette cover. The leatherette had a rich, strong smell, and there were other smells besides, of gasoline and dust and people's clothes.

For a long time she watched flying farms and cornfields, woods and hills, the light was very bright. Dogs Lay in the shade under trees, but cats slept on front doorsteps with the sun on their fur.

The bus stopped at Melody, the next town, and the man and woman got out, the man still yawning and rubbing his face, and the woman sighing and shaking her head about the heat. Nobody else got on. The driver turned and looked at Garnet.

"Like to go fast?" he asked. "The old bus has some speed in her still. I tell you what. You've got it all to yourself now; and you can pretend like you're a lady with a shofer. I'll show you some driving. How'll that be?"

"Oh I'd love it!" cried Garnet, and off they went.

They drove like fire. up hills and down; around curves on two wheels; and the telegraph poles rushed by like tall giraffes in a hurry. Birds flew from fences; hens rocketed out of the way, and the wind whistled.

Garnet bounced from side to side of the slippery seat